

**CORRECT
PUNCTUATION**

PUNCTUATION.

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CORRECT PUNCTUATION

AND
Effective Sentence Construction

By
MAX CROMBIE

Author of
"HOW TO JUDGE CHARACTER," ETC.



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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE

CORRECT punctuation and sentence construction are essential in the business world of to-day, when commerce is so far-reaching. It is not by any means a difficult art to acquire, yet it is abused almost universally. Not many typists know how to punctuate a letter correctly; yet when a business chief is dictating letters to his typist he should not be forced to indicate also the position of every comma.

A punctuation mark placed incorrectly can alter the meaning of a sentence, and a remarkable instance of this can be quoted in the case of a certain Act of Parliament, where a comma was misplaced in the printed copy. A fresh Act had to be rushed through hurriedly, altering the error!

There is also the well-known humorous case of the Stuart monarch: "King Charles walked and talked half an hour after his head

was cut off.” Insert a semicolon after the word “talked”, and see what a difference it makes.

In this book everything is explained in Max Crombie’s clear and concise style.

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CORRECT PUNCTUATION

CHAPTER ONE

THE PRINCIPLES OF SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

IT cannot be emphasised too clearly at the outset that the aim of this book is not to teach grammar. Throughout its length it will be assumed that the student is familiar with the principal grammatical rules.

If, then, we adopt a viewpoint other than that of the grammarian, what shall it be? This is an important point, and one that cannot too soon be dealt with. We are going to approach our subject from the single standpoint of *precise expression*. We are going to look for rules and guiding principles in sentence construction and punctuation which

will assist us in the development of a smooth and easy style of writing, of which the key-note will be *crystal clearness*.

STYLE—WHAT IS IT?

What do we mean by “style” in writing? I have defined it as the “sum total of the qualities which make a piece of verbal or written composition distinctive or memorable”. We can thus have a poor style as well as a good one; but the term, when unqualified, is usually accepted as signifying a commendable style.

It can be stated briefly that the key-note of a good modern style is *simplicity*. The long and fearfully involved sentences of early writers are quite out of harmony with present-day conditions. Simplicity does not necessarily mean short sentences; a sentence may contain several clauses, yet be perfectly simple and straightforward in its construction. On the other hand, quite a short sentence, badly constructed, can be ambiguous in the extreme.

Punctuation plays such an important part in sentence construction that the two may be

very usefully studied together as facets of the same subject. The student who masters the effective use of punctuation cannot fail to grasp the fundamental principles of sentence construction.

PREFERENCE IN PUNCTUATION

While it might be in order to say that few people, other than professional and experienced writers, know how to punctuate accurately and intelligently, it would be wrong to say that few persons know how to punctuate their sentences *correctly*, for where can we find the standard of correctness necessary to the judgment? Correctness seems to demand exactitude; but punctuation, I suggest, is not and cannot be an exact branch of writing. Given quite a simple sentence, there may easily be two ways at least of punctuating it. No one can say that this way is right or that way is wrong. But we can say: "I prefer to punctuate it in this way." That is one of the first things we have to realise—that there is ample scope in punctuation for personal taste.

PUNCTUATION AND GRAMMAR

It is an extraordinary thing, but many whose duty it is as teachers to remove from a subject the vagueness and indefiniteness that surrounds it, succeed only in rendering it even more obscure by the verbal smoke-screen of their own exposition. In this way, in attempting to teach punctuation solely by reference to grammatical construction and rule, the teacher robs the subject of its lively interest and invests it with quite unnecessary terrors. Let us be perfectly frank and admit that we—the great majority of us—love correct speech but do not love grammar, as such!

AN AID TO CLEAR SELF-
EXPRESSION

Is it possible to teach the minor art of punctuation without recourse to grammar? Why not? Do we express ourselves in writing in order to flatter the grammarian with our nice regard for his rules? No; we write in order to express ourselves—to convey our ideas and thoughts to another, or at least to

give them permanent form for our own later satisfaction or use. Our aim is self-expression, and it is as an aid to precise self-expression that punctuation is considered here.

WHAT IS PUNCTUATION?

Punctuation may be defined as the employment of standardised signs, with accepted interpretations, to assist the conveying of the writer's exact meaning to the reader. It is essential that the signs employed shall have accepted interpretations placed upon them, and we have to-day reached the stage where our signs fulfil this requirement.

THREE GROUPS OF SIGNS

Some authorities state or infer that punctuation is properly concerned only with the four principal signs—the comma, the semicolon, the colon, and the period. This may be strictly so, but here we are going to consider punctuation as a wider thing, embracing many more than these four. For the purpose of reference the signs may be grouped as PRIMARY, SECONDARY, and COMPOUND.

This classification, however, is purely arbitrary, and is adopted solely for our present purpose.

The PRIMARY signs then are :

The Comma ;

The Semicolon ;

The Colon ;

The Period.

The SECONDARY signs are :

The Dash ;

The Hyphen ;

The Parentheses ;

The Apostrophe ;

The Question Mark ;

The Exclamation Mark ;

The Single Quotation Marks ;

The Double Quotation Marks.

The COMPOUND signs are :

The Hiatus [. . .] ;

The Pointer [:—] ;

Bracketed Interrogation Mark [(?)] ;

Bracketed Exclamation Mark [(!)] .

THE PRIMARY SIGNS

It is with the primary signs that the unpractised writer experiences the greatest

laboured. The words should perform their function without this adventitious aid. Similarly to be deplored and rigidly to be curbed is the tendency to use double or even treble question or exclamation marks. In neither of the following examples is anything gained from the multiplication of the marks.

(2) Is this what we joined the army for ???

(3) The sergeant-major was cleaning the orderly man's boots !!!

This sort of thing may pass in a comic paper, but it is out of place elsewhere.

Charles Dickens—one of the master-writers whose punctuation examples should certainly not be followed, for his ideas on the subject were of the strangest—has a footnote to *Martin Chuzzlewit* :

(4) The most credulous reader will scarcely believe that Mr. Pecksniff's reasoning was once set upon as the Author's !!

One more example :

(5) "What leadership ! What a tragedy !!
What a lesson !!!"

—*The Locomotive Journal*

CHAPTER TWO

STYLE AND SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION

THE style which finds favour to-day—among publishers, editors, teachers, examiners, business executives, and advertisers alike—is that which is based upon short, crisp sentences. This does not mean sentences of ten words or so, but sentences which are short compared with what used to be written. Here is a sentence, quoted in another connection by Sir A. Quiller-Couch in his book, *On the Art of Writing*:

- (6) Since all the evil in the world consists in the disagreeing between the object and the appetite, as when a man hath what he desires not, or desires what he hath not, or desires amiss, he that compares his spirit to the present accident hath variety of instance for his virtue, but

none to trouble him, because his desires enlarge not beyond his present fortune ; and a wise man is placed in a variety of chances, like the nave or centre of a wheel in the midst of all the circumvolutions and changes of posture, without violence or change, save that it turns gently in compliance with its changed parts, and is indifferent which part is up, and which is down ; for there is some virtue or other to be exercised whatever happens — either patience or thanksgiving, love or fear, moderation or humility, charity or contentedness.—JEREMY TAYLOR

No matter what we may think of this as prose (Sir Arthur thinks it poor), the fact remains that we find it difficult to follow when we read it, and we should certainly find it far from easy to punctuate.

AN ARNOLD BENNETT EXAMPLE

Now compare this passage from a short story by that modern master-writer, Arnold Bennett :

(7) Of course when you are in love you are

in love. Anything may happen to you then. Most things do happen. For example, Adam Tellwright found himself ascending the stairs of No. 22 Machin Street at an early hour one morning. He was, I need not say, mounting to the third floor to give an order to the potter's modeller, who had a studio up there. Still he stopped at the first floor, knocked at a door labelled "Balsamo", hesitated and went in. I need not say that he had no belief whatever in palmistry, and was not in the least superstitious. A young man was seated at a desk, a stylish young man. Adam Tellwright smiled, as one who expected the young man to join in the joke. But the young man did not smile.

There are 136 words in the Arnold Bennett passage, against 146 in the extract from Jeremy Taylor. But Mr. Bennett has ten sentences against Jeremy's one! Mr. Bennett's longest sentence is one of twenty-five words. His average is thirteen. Observe

what a tremendous double influence this has on clarity of style, and on the simplicity of the punctuation. Apart from inverted commas and an apostrophe, Mr. Bennett has nothing but commas and periods. No colons, no semicolons, and no dashes.

WRITE FOR THE ORDINARY READER

It may be protested by some that the beauty of Taylor's prose is immeasurably superior to any parallel quality possessed by Mr. Bennett's, and that the young writer should be advised to model his style on Taylor, rather than on Bennett. I do not agree. As profitable as the study of the older writers unquestionably is, their style is not that which finds favour to-day with the great proportion of readers. Let us not lose sight of the fact that, in the overwhelming majority of instances, we are writing, not merely to please ourselves, not to show that we can give out from our pen a two-hundred word sentence without losing our way, nor to please the pedant and the scholar, but that we may be read, understood and appreciated by ordinary people.

This is not intended to mean that writers like Arnold Bennett, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, and W. J. Locke "write down" to the ordinary people. They are every bit as much appreciated by educated and cultured persons; it is their added virtue that they are also understood of the ordinary people.

SHORT SENTENCES, SIMPLY PUNCTUATED

What bearing has this on our subject? A very close and real one. The young writer, anxious to develop a clear style, should ponder deeply upon the great extent to which our best living writers owe their superlative clarity of style to *simplification*. SHORT SENTENCES, SIMPLY PUNCTUATED—no mean part of their secret is contained in those four words.

MIXED PUNCTUATION

The young writer is most likely to experience difficulty where the various signs come together. In correcting the punctuation of students and others, I have observed a tendency to use two signs where one would suffice.

Where two punctuation signs come together, it is the result of the way in which the sentence has been constructed, or of personal preference on the part of the writer. Whichever way it is, care should be taken to ensure, firstly, that both signs are necessary (for in certain circumstances one "fuses" with the other); and, secondly, that the signs are in their correct positions relative to each other.

A WARNING EXAMPLE

This point of signs coming together receives attention in later sections, but a single example may be given here.

- (8) Like a bad dream, the memory of those impressions,—of the hospital room and the sick-room and the rattle of town, slipped from me, as I saw unwinding the pattern of that Irish country of the mid-west ;—lake and wood, cottages of white and tawny gold, (darker now for the rain ;) and fields dotted here and there with cattle, here and there with sheep.

—GRACE RHYS

In this short passage are three examples of

signs coming together. With all possible respect to the writer—the sentence is taken from a short story, *Destiny and a Dog*—I regard this as a striking example of how not to punctuate.

The comma after *impressions* is unnecessary in view of the presence of the dash, which good modern practice has given a superior strength to the comma. It is therefore a case of the greater including the less. Moreover, this particular dash is being used parenthetically, as examination of the remainder of the sentence clearly shows.

The second mistake is the omission of the second of the parenthetical dashes. This should have been inserted after *town*, where a comma is wrongly used instead. Freed from this parenthesis the sentence reads: *Like a bad dream, the memory of those impressions slipped from me . . .*

CONFUSION WITH THE DASHES

Either the semicolon or the dash after *mid-west* should go. It should be understood clearly that this dash has no connection what-

ever with the one after *impressions*. If this dash is intended to be the second of the parenthetical pair of which the dash after *impressions* is the first—well, the punctuation becomes worse than ever! We will presume the lesser of the two evils—that the writer intended the second dash to introduce the details of the scene. Which of the two—the semicolon or the dash—should be sacrificed depends on how the punctuation of the earlier part is manipulated, and we will return to this point in a moment.

The comma before the parenthesis and after *gold* is quite superfluous; it serves no useful purpose whatever. But the worst slip of all is the placing of the semicolon after *rain* inside the parenthesis.

The rule for the sign which falls contiguous to parenthesis in this manner is for it to go outside. In the example in question the semicolon does not belong to the phrase in parentheses, but to that part of the sentence which includes the parentheses. If it is placed inside the parentheses, it is cut off from the remainder of the sentence, and prevented from

fulfilling its function. In other words, the semicolon (or some other stop) is required, quite independent of the parentheses.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SENTENCE

In considering how this sentence should be punctuated let us examine its structure.

The sentence proper—that is, the central statement—is quite clear. *The memory of those impressions slipped from me.* That is all; the rest is amplification. *Like a bad dream* is an adverbial clause defining how the memory slipped. . . . *as I saw unwinding the pattern of that Irish country of the mid-west* is an adverbial clause telling when the memory slipped. . . . *of the hospital room and the sick-room and the rattle of town* is an extension of the subject; *memory . . . lake and wood, etc.,* to the end of the sentence, is an extension of the adverbial clause of time.

THE AMENDED PUNCTUATION

Here is the sentence, as I suggest it should be punctuated :

- (9) Like a bad dream, the memory of those impressions—of the hospital room and the sick-room and the rattle of town—slipped from me, as I saw unwinding the pattern of that Irish country of the mid-west: lake and wood, cottages of white and tawny gold, darker now for the rain, and fields dotted here and there with cattle, here and there with sheep.

The only point in this sentence open to question is the colon following *mid-west*, on the ground that this separates what follows too sharply from the adverbial clause to which it belongs. But I feel that this stop can be justified by regarding the words *I saw* as understood before *lake and wood*. By modern usage, the colon is used in the case of enumeration such as this. Notice that the original semicolon inside the second parenthesis has become a comma, because this comma would have been there in any case.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COMMA AS AN AID TO CLEARNESS

IT has been said of certain writers that their work appears to have been peppered with buckshot in the shape of commas. It is true of most young writers that their expenditure of commas is lavish.

TWO RULES FOR THE USE OF COMMAS

Keeping clearly in mind that punctuation is not the tool of the grammarian (except in minor instances, such as the apostrophe indicating the possessive case), nor the handmaiden of the pedant, but a real and living aid to self-expression, a simple but safe rule emerges for the use of commas—*use the comma when no other sign is plainly called for, and when the absence of a sign of some sort will detract from*

clearness. This rule, used in conjunction with another of equal simplicity—*use the comma in writing where a pause would clearly be made in speaking*—should banish a great many of the doubts that assail the young writer.

AN EXEMPLARY SENTENCE

Take, for example, the following sentence, here given entirely unpunctuated internally :

- (10) The characteristics of the three primaries of which all colours are made up for each of the three primaries has its characteristic are red heat blue cold and yellow luminosity.

This sentence would probably be punctuated by the comma-lover as follows :

- (11) The characteristics of the three primaries, of which all colours are made up, for each of the three primaries has its characteristic, are, red, heat, blue, cold, and yellow, luminosity.

THE IMPROVED PUNCTUATION

It cannot be said that if this sentence is studied carefully the writer's meaning can very

well escape us ; but the fact remains that the sentence as it stands leaves a great deal to be desired. It has been said above that most young writers use far too many commas. Now it must be understood clearly that, in trying to reduce the number of commas, we can resort to three things—(i) their omission ; (ii) substitution of other and better signs for certain of them ; and (iii) the employment of such typographical means as italic type or capital letters for certain words—it is assumed that we are writing for publication. Here is the sentence improved along these lines :

- (12) The characteristics of the three primaries of which all colours are made up (for each of the primaries has its characteristic) are : red HEAT, blue COLD, and yellow LUMINOSITY.

THE CONJUNCTION AND THE COMMA

A common and superfluous use of the comma is before the conjunction *and*. In the following sentences the comma is quite unnecessary under our rule of clearness.

- (13) He went to the Exhibition and met his brother.
- (14) I am unable to get coal and am without a fire in my room.
- (15) I am not at all anxious to go and shall write and say so.

WHEN IT IS JUSTIFIED

Sometimes, however, the comma before the conjunction *and* is justified. It is so when the writer desires a short pause, in order to heighten the impressive effect of what follows. For example, in the following sentence the author uses a comma to separate the clauses, and thus heighten the contrast between the commonplace beginning and the strong suggestiveness of the ending.

- (16) He paid the price of twenty cigarettes to pass through the turnstile, and the magic of Empire stretched before him.

THE TWO-CLAUSE SENTENCE

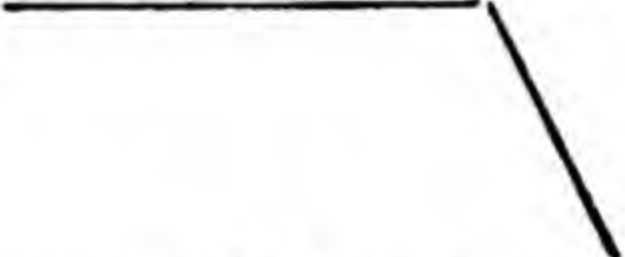
The comma is superfluous where a conjunction joins two clauses which are similar in direction or tendency. Thus :

- (17) He went to Paris and enjoyed himself thoroughly.

The second clause is the perfectly natural development of the first, and the reader is conscious of logical and uninterrupted progress. But when the second part of the sentence is opposed to the first part, a comma is called for, thus :

- (18) He placed his hand on the light switch, but was floored by a stunning blow on the side of his head.

Here there is an abrupt change of direction. If the sentence is amended to read: *He placed his hand on the switch and flooded the room with light*, no comma is needed. In example 17, the reader's progress is in the form of a straight line, so _____, but in example 18 there is more or less an abrupt change of direction, so _____



The comma is required in order to indicate the pause necessary to the turn.

In the following sentence the comma after

COMMA AN AID TO CLEARNESS 55

indigo is superfluous, for there is no change of direction :

- (19) The colours of the spectrum are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

The comma after *yellow* in the following sentence is, however, necessary from the standpoint of clearness :

- (20) The most luminous of these colours is yellow, and purple is the least luminous.

SEPARATING ADJECTIVES WITH COMMAS

Commas are correctly used to separate adjectives when two or more precede a noun. No comma, however, is needed between the final adjective and the noun.

- (21) " You are a nasty, mean, despicable child," said Mrs. Waters.

Here emphasis is given by the pauses indicated by the commas. Try the effect of a pause between *despicable* and *child*. It ruins the sentence.

When two adjectives are joined together by *and*, no comma is needed. Again, any

adjective which is closely related to the noun is—for the purpose of punctuation—regarded as part of the noun, and a comma is not required to separate it from the adjective.

(22) “ You are a hateful, cross and irritable little girl.”

Here we have three adjectives (*cross*, *irritable* and *little*) preceding the noun and not separated at all by punctuation. The word *little* is so closely related to *girl* that the noun may be regarded as *little girl*. Therefore no comma is needed between *irritable* and *little*. *Cross* and *irritable* are joined by the conjunction *and*, and again no comma is needed.

SEPARATING THE PREFATORY OR RELATING CLAUSE

What may be termed the “ prefatory ”, or “ relating ” word or clause, at the beginning of a sentence, is separated from the sentence proper by a comma. The following are examples :

(23) Furthermore, his term of office has expired.

(24) Again, the Prime Minister was at a loss to know what to do for the best.

INVERTED SENTENCES

Sometimes a sentence is inverted, and the comma is retained, though the separate parts are transposed.

- (25) The prisoner was acquitted on all counts, thanks to a most ingenious defence.
- (26) Thanks to a most ingenious defence, the prisoner was acquitted on all counts.
- (27) Smith was led out to be shot, debonair to the end.
- (28) Debonair to the end, Smith was led out to be shot.

THE INTRODUCTORY SAVING CLAUSE

Doubt often exists as to whether or not a comma should be used after an introductory saving clause. Is a comma needed in the following instances?

(29) If that is the position we should succeed.

(30) Provided you go armed you are safe.

It might quite fairly be argued that a comma after *position* in the first example and after *armed* in the second would add nothing to

clearness and therefore might be omitted. Personally, however, I should use the comma in both these instances. But after a long introductory saving clause, it is certainly best to use a comma—on the analogy that a pause is desirable after a long clause of this nature.

- (31) If the treacherous minister who had poisoned the king's mind so effectually against every member of his family not resident at court could have had his way, the prince would have been banished.

Here the pause is obviously wanted, to prevent the sentence proper being overshadowed by the long introductory clause.

INTERNAL SAVING CLAUSES

Supplementary or saving clauses occurring in the middle of sentences are usually placed between commas, though dashes or parentheses may be used, as in the following example.

- (32) When I can find the book, if I think it will be of any use to you, I will send it.

THE COMPOUND SUBJECT

When a predicate has a compound subject, it is usual to separate the parts by commas, and a comma is needed between the final part of the subject and the predicate, in order to show that the predicate belongs, not merely to that last part of the subject, but to all of it.

- (33) Her eyes, her hair, her teeth, her ears, her lips, thrilled him as he had thought never to be thrilled again.

THE RULES RECAPITULATED

The student should not now have any great difficulty with the commas. But remember the two rules :

- (i) Use the comma when no other sign is plainly called for, and when the absence of a sign of some sort will detract from clearness ; and
- (ii) Use the comma in writing where a pause would clearly be made in speaking.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW AND WHEN TO USE THE SEMICOLON OR COLON

THE semicolon should not give the student much trouble. It is called for when we have two statements to make which are so closely linked as part of that which we wish to express that they properly share the same sentence, but which are sufficiently differentiated to require to be separated by something more than a comma.

(34) The customer has said that she will take the goods ; that is the end of it.

(35) Some of these men have been brutally treated ; their faces tell the story.

THE WRONG USE OF THE SEMICOLON

The student should beware of the two extremes of error—using the semicolon where

a comma is all that is needed, and using the semicolon where something stronger, either a colon or a period, is called for.

(36) I will send you a note; and shall expect an answer.

(37) The rebel general concluded the survey of his forces at midnight; at dawn the attack was launched.

In example 36 above, a comma would be adequate, because the second part of the sentence follows perfectly naturally on the first. The comma is needed for the sake of emphatic pause. In example 37 a semicolon is required because the second part of the sentence is really a separate item of information. The inspection is one thing; the attack another.

A TEST FOR THE SEMICOLON

Generally speaking, that which is separated or "cut off" by a semicolon should be capable of standing by itself, with or without the deletion of the conjunction if there is one.

(38) Proud men, scholars—Milton, Sir

Thomas Browne—practise the rolling Latin sentence ; but upon the rhythms of our Bible they, too, fall back.

—A. QUILLER-COUGH

Here the semicolon could quite well be replaced by a period—in this instance without the deletion of the conjunction. It is better as it is, but the point is that the latter part of the sentence is capable of standing by itself.

A SIMPLE RULE FOR SEMICOLONS

Use a semicolon when what you have to say is part of the main thought or idea being expressed in the sentence under construction. But being more or less capable of standing by itself (that is, being more than a mere clause), it requires to be separated from the preceding part by something “stronger” than a comma.

WHEN THE CONJUNCTION IS DELETED

The semicolon is sometimes used when a conjunction is deleted. Take example 36.

I will send you a note, and shall expect an answer.

This could have been expressed :

(39) I will send you a note ; I shall expect an answer.

The second version puts a quiet emphasis on the expectation of an answer.

MATTER IN COLUMN FORM

The semicolon is properly used where information is set out in column form. For example :

(40) There are three sources of extra sales :

- (i) More customers ;
- (ii) More sales to the same customers ;
- (iii) Sales retrieved which would otherwise be lost.

—C. C. KNIGHTS

EXAMPLES FROM WELL-KNOWN WRITERS

Here are some examples of the use of semicolons from well-known writers.

(41) When Carlyle said to the emigrants,

“ Here and now is your America ”, he spoke as a realist to romanticists ; and Ibsen was of the same mind when he finally decided that there is more tragedy in the next suburban villa than in a whole imaginary Italy of unauthentic Borgias.

—BERNARD SHAW

- (42) He did not adopt any innovation until it had become moral ; then he adopted it, not on its merits, but solely because it had become moral. In doing so, he never realised that it had ever been immoral ; consequently its early struggles taught him no lesson ; and he had opposed the next step in human progress as indignantly as if neither manners, customs, nor thought had ever changed since the beginning of the world.—*Ibid.*

It will be seen in this example that the parts which Shaw has separated by means of semi-colons are capable of standing on their own. Thus the passage could be repunctuated without any very serious loss of effect as follows :

- (43) He did not adopt any innovation until it had become moral. Then he adopted it, not on its merits, but solely because it had become moral. In doing so, he never realised that it had ever been immoral. Consequently its early struggles taught him no lesson. He had opposed the next step in human progress as indignantly as if neither manners, customs, nor thought had ever changed since the beginning of the world.

It is interesting to note that Shaw uses *neither* in this sentence, though referring to more than two things. His object is to link together the two words *manners* and *customs*, separating them, as one idea, from the word *thought*. It would be better to write . . . *neither manners nor customs—nor thought—had ever changed*, etc.

- (44) There was a shrewd wind blowing, and I shivered all over ; but the cold at my heart was worse, and my hate of the man who had set it there grew with every step.—A. QUILLER-COUCH
- (45) Clouds began to gather over the moon's

fall, and every now and then I stumbled heavily on the uneven ground ; but he moved along nimbly enough, and even cried “ Shoo ! ” when a startled plover flew up before his feet.—*Ibid.*

(46) There are very few rules of design in the novel ; but the few are capital. In my opinion the first rule is that the interest must be centralised ; it must not be diffused equally over various parts of the canvas.—ARNOLD BENNETT

(47) The blowing flames and the blue smoke were alive and beautiful ; but behind them they were leaving blackened skeleton twigs.—JOHN GALSWORTHY

(48) Martyrdom was the daily bread of his race ; oppression had been his apprenticeship to life.—PERCIVAL GIBBON

(49) The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window ; she then returned, and putting her elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.—G. K. CHESTERTON

- (50) The Holy One, blessed be He, would know she did not mean to work; perhaps in His mercy He would make allowance for an old woman who had never profaned His rest-day before.

—I. ZANGWILL

AN ALTERNATIVE PUNCTUATION

Here is a passage, rich in semicolons, taken from a story by Jane Findlater. Their use is clearly justified, in that something more than commas is called for; but I give, following the original extract, my own punctuation of this passage. I feel that the conversion of some of the semicolons into periods tends to clearness and ease of reading.

- (51) Then in marched Flora, just about her own age, and incredibly importunate. First she wanted tea, of course; Katie refused; then a scone from the pile on the table; a second refusal; then a "drop milk"; refusal number three; then an old skirt—but at this Katie became impatient and told her to go away, in no bated language.

(52) Then in marched Flora, just about her own age, and incredibly importunate. First, she wanted tea, of course; Katie refused. Then a scone from the pile on the table; a second refusal. Then a "drop milk"; refusal number three. Then an old skirt—but at this Katie became impatient and told her to go away, in no bated language.

THE COLON

The colon is next in "strength" to the period, but is rarely used to-day. In the days when sentences rolled on for a page and a half sometimes, colons were needed. As stated in Chapter Two, however, the style which has found favour to-day is one which gives preference to short sentences.

WHEN TO USE THE COLON

Because the colon is next in strength to the period, we should be careful to use it only when those parts which precede and follow the colon respectively are quite—or practically—self-contained, and certainly capable of standing

alone. The following is perhaps a perfect example of the justified use of the colon, for each part of the sentence is a "limb", but their mutual dependence, one on the other, is indisputable.

(53) "The king is dead : long live the king." This is the accepted way of indicating that, with the death of the old king, a new king, to whom we owe equal allegiance, immediately and automatically takes his place. This sentence might be made into two, as below ; whether or not this would be done depends on *exactly* what impression the author wishes to convey.

(54) "The king is dead ! Long live the king !" See how a different impression is conveyed by yet another rendering :

(55) "The king . . . is dead ! . . . Long . . . live . . . the king !"

The emotion felt by the speaker is here unmistakably conveyed to the reader, solely by punctuation.

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE COLON'S USE

The following three examples are taken from *On the Art of Writing*, by Sir A. Quiller-Couch.

None the less I feel personally that, in the first two instances, a semicolon would have been adequate : in the last I should have made two separate sentences of the one.

- (56) An old Sixth Form master once said to me, " You may give up Latin Verse, for this term, if you will : but I warn you, no one can be a real scholar who does not constantly practise verse."
- (57) The man who uses it debases the currency of learning : and I suggest to you that it is one of the many functions of a great University to maintain the standard of that currency.
- (58) I do not accuse the author (who seemed to be a learned man) of having invented this abominable term : apparently it passed current among physiologists, and he had accepted it for honest coin.

Here is a sentence from a short story by the same distinguished author, in which the colon is effectively used :

- (59) The flute stopped for a minute or so, but just as I was expecting to see the

shutter open, went on again: this time the air was "Pretty Polly Oliver".

HOW NOT TO USE THE COLON

Here are two examples of the palpable misuse of colons, from the same page of *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

(60) And he promptly entered: shutting the board-room door after him, as carefully as if he were about to plot a murder.—CHARLES DICKENS

(61) In his musty old pocket-book he carried contradictory cards, in some of which he called himself a coal-merchant, in others a commission agent, in others a collector, in others an accountant: as if he didn't really know the secret himself.—*Ibid.*

Such examples could be multiplied from the works of Dickens, whose notion of punctuation, as has been said, was of the strangest.

THE COLON BEFORE DIALOGUE

There is, however, another use for the colon which I feel to be perfectly justified and in

order—after the matter leading up to dialogue, provided the dialogue is closely linked to that matter.

(62) John very deliberately removed his hat, scarf and boots. Then he demanded :

“Hasn’t it occurred to somebody that I might be hungry ? ”

(63) The man with the far-away expression made a pretence of adjusting Miss Tangle’s cushion, and whispered :

“ Oh, the villain ! The double-dyed, treacherous villain ! ”

In the following example, however, the colon is properly replaced by a full-stop, as the paragraph containing the dialogue carries evidence of its connection with “ David. ”

(64) David closed the window with a sigh, and drew the curtains.

“ It seems pretty hopeless,” he said.
“ There’s not another post now until to-morrow morning.”

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERIOD AND THE PARAGRAPH

THE period does not call for lengthy treatment, as it is difficult, almost to the point of impossibility, to go wrong with it. It has two principal uses—to indicate the conclusion of a sentence, or to mark an abbreviation. Its use at the end of the sentence is well understood, and most persons are careful to use it after an abbreviated word.

SENTENCES WITHOUT VERBS

Something was said in Chapter One of the old idea that every sentence had to contain a verb, or to be more explicit, a subject and a predicate. Modern writers do not pay much attention to this rule, when it suits their purpose to ignore it. Here is an example, from a text-book on salesmanship.

(65) Rabbits run to the thicket. Wild ducks to the marsh. Eagles to the tops of mountains. Every living thing seeks its own best environment. Including customers.—HERBERT N. CASSON

Whatever the grammarians may have to say about this, at least the author cannot be accused of having an obscure style!

Here is a further example:

(66) So that was Heaven!

No lilac. No pink rose, nor white rose.

No work. No pink feet on the tiles. Nothing but an enormous, everlasting old woman's ward, built of solid gold, and without even a kitten.—MARY WEBB

SUGGESTING EMOTION

This staccato style most emphatically has its faults. Crudely done or overdone, it becomes wearisome and irritating. But it is an admirable device to induce a strong suggestion of mental stress and emotion. Here is a typical extract of this nature, from Fannie

Hurst's *Mannequin*—a story which secured for its authoress a prize of £10,000.

(67) What made Orchid stay in a swoon? She must get better. To explain. That red-faced fellow—seen him before—sure enough—when I was a police reporter. Captain Gallagher. Well—well—what was all the fuss about? Why were they letting in that string of people? Note-books. Why the blazes was everybody writing in note-books? Measuring. Just like the old days. The old police reporting days—out on a case.—FANNIE HURST

ABBREVIATIONS AND THE PERIOD

The second principal use of the period—to indicate an abbreviation—is almost as well understood. It is always placed after initials, and after such contractions as Messrs., Dr., Mrs., Mr., Esq., and so on. It is not required after Miss, of course.

TWO SIGNS TOGETHER

Where a contraction is followed by another punctuation sign, *other than another period, a*

query mark, or an exclamation mark, the second sign must also go in. For example :

(68) What has become of Brown's Bank, Ltd., I wonder ?

Where the contracted word is the last word in the sentence, which would in the ordinary way have been terminally punctuated with a period, a query mark, or an exclamation mark, the one mark serves the double purpose.

(69) Write a letter to-day to Motors, Ltd.

We write *p.c.* for post card and *P.O.* for postal order. But how should we write the plural forms of these ? *P.c.'s* and *P.O.'s* are correct ; the apostrophe indicates the omission of letters, and the period is rendered superfluous. In the following sentence, however, the period belongs to the sentence as a whole, and has nothing to do with the contraction :

(70) Seal letters containing cheques or *P.O.'s*.

THE PARAGRAPH

Most young writers who have trouble with their sentences also have difficulty in getting their matter satisfactorily arranged in paragraphs.

This matter of paragraphing can and should be approached in exactly the same manner as punctuation—from the standpoint of clearness of expression. Our object in writing is to convey our thoughts, views, opinions or knowledge to others. Anything is good that helps us more easily, more surely, and more accurately to do this. Anything which operates against us in this way is bad.

LOGICAL PROGRESSION

One of the most important things in written or oral self-expression is *logical progression*. Every word, every phrase, every sentence, every paragraph, must be getting us somewhere. Our progress must be in a forward direction all the time.

Now, progression is a matter of taking steps, and as soon as we begin to regard our paragraphs as strides, we are beginning to see daylight.

ONE STRIDE—ONE PARAGRAPH

In writing, aim to progress smoothly and logically all the time, and *paragraph your matter so that each paragraph represents a definite stride*

forward. This is the simplest and sanest rule for paragraphing, because it recognises that the vital thing for which we should be striving continually is to make ourselves understood.

What we have to convey to our readers is a sort of mental food, and we must be careful not to give such large "helpings" that our readers are turned against our fare. Matter that is made up of long and solid-looking paragraphs is like a suet pudding—very nourishing, no doubt, but not in any degree tempting. But cut into thin slices, and served daintily, even suet pudding becomes tempting.

OVERDONE PARAGRAPHING

Because of the repellent appearance of matter that is set in very long paragraphs, there is a tendency among writers to overdo paragraphing, exactly as there is a tendency to overdo most things which are desirable. The matter which is over-paragraphed, so that few paragraphs contain more than two sentences and some contain only one, is violating our rule of easy progression, for it transforms our striding progress into a tiring series of short hops.

The following is an extract, taken from *Better Salesmanship*, by Herbert N. Casson. Mr. Casson's books are remarkable for their lucidity, but his characteristic style of a fresh paragraph for practically every sentence is tiresome.

(71) There was another shop that had been dozing along for years. It paid its way and a trifle over. It was owned by one man and it gave him a living—that was about all it did.

Then, in 1921, it was caught with a lot of dead stock. All its surplus was wiped out.

This smash did it more good than anything else in its experience.

Few men will learn from books and magazines. Most of them only learn by trouble and loss.

They are like small boys who never learn to let wasps alone until they have been stung.

So, in 1921, this shoe dealer woke up. He started to make war on dead stock.

He made a rule—"I will never buy more than six weeks' supply of anything."

He cut out slow-moving lines, such as felt slippers, house slippers, etc.

He was entirely cured of the notion that he must have a complete stock.

"My shop isn't a SHOE MUSEUM," he said.

"Its only purpose is to sell shoes as fast as possible."—H. N. CASSON

PRACTICE ESSENTIAL

Like all other things which combine to give facility in creative writing, correct paragraphing comes from practice. The basis of clear writing is clear thinking, and the man who has his points clearly in mind, mentally marshalled and arrayed in their right order, will not experience any serious difficulty in knowing when to begin a new paragraph. At the same time even the practised writer will keep a watchful eye on his paragraphing, and correct it where necessary when reading through what he has written.

SHORT PARAGRAPHS SUSTAIN INTEREST

It is not enough for our writing to secure interest ; it must sustain it. The beginning of a new paragraph is a valuable way of reviving interest. For this reason the advice that is sometimes given—one idea, one paragraph—is not always good advice, for some ideas require lengthy treatment to do them justice. Here a series of comparatively short, interest-sustaining paragraphs is clearly to be preferred to one long, exhaustive and exhausting paragraph. The paragraphing of matter containing dialogue is dealt with later.

So much for the four primary signs. Now we come to a consideration of the eight secondary signs.

CHAPTER SIX

THE EXPRESSIVE DASH AND THE HYPHEN

THE dash is a punctuation mark that is extremely useful as an aid to clear expression. It has two principal uses—to separate more distinctively than a comma could do a part of the sentence, or to precede and follow an interjected or parenthetical clause. A third use, which is really a development of the first, is to introduce a remark which is intended to administer a mild shock to the reader, or to move him to laughter.

THE DASH INSTEAD OF A COMMA

The following are examples of the use of the dash in the first of these purposes :

- (72) I shall be home by seven o'clock—that is, if I am coming home at all to-night.

- (73) There are no grounds for your suspicion—at least, none so far as I can discover.

It will be seen from these examples that the dash is very useful for introducing a qualifying statement.

- (74) I have discovered—but that had better wait until I see you.

- (75) By the time you return I shall be in a position to help you financially—but then, of course, you won't need it.

In these examples the dash introduces an afterthought.

THE DASH USED TO GIVE EMPHASIS

Occasionally, the dash can be used in place of a comma, as giving more emphasis to what follows. I say *occasionally* advisedly, for this use of the dash grows upon one, and care must be exercised that we do not weaken the effectiveness of this most helpful use of the dash by resorting to it without justification.

The following are examples of the substitution of the dash for the comma, in order to give emphasis to what follows it.

- (76) When selecting from among experienced salesmen, the sales manager will be guided to some extent by the applicants' past records—but too much reliance should not be placed on these.

—C. C. KNIGHTS

- (77) For the assistant who is rude after being called up “on the carpet” and warned, there is only one punishment—*instant dismissal.—Ibid.*

TO PRECEDE THINGS ENUMERATED

The dash can be used when enumeration follows the explanatory part of a sentence, though a colon is generally more effective.

- (78) Clearly, two possible courses of action are open—to express regret and let it go at that, or to express regret and attempt to sell what is available.
- (79) The duties of a sales manager of a large concern may be grouped under three heads—Constructive, Investigative, and Administrative.

THE COMPOUND SUBJECT AND THE DASH

Where a sentence has a "compound" subject, the meaning can be made clearer by the use of a dash followed by a pronoun.

(80) The man of snap judgments, and the one who experiences difficulty in making up his mind at all—these do not make good sales managers.

(81) Reading good books, attending lectures, visiting museums and art galleries, seeing the wonderful travel films that are shown from time to time, learning to appreciate good music—all these are ways of achieving personal culture.

THE PARENTHETICAL DASH

Here are some examples of the use of the dash in the second of the three ways mentioned on page 60—to enclose some part of the sentence and place it in parentheses:

(82) Those who know little of the theory of

colour—and few printers know much—will find this book invaluable.

(83) The fourth point—effect on cost of production of adaptation—must be watched closely.

(84) Orange—incomparably the most useful of the secondaries in commercial work—combines the strength of Red with the luminosity of Yellow.

Where the dash is used to indicate parentheses, it must be used in pairs. Where the matter to be put in parentheses is at all long or involved, it is better to make a separate sentence of it.

THE DASH AND THE BRACKET

What may be termed the legitimate punctuation marks for parentheses are the brackets () or []. In what circumstances may dashes be substituted for brackets? It may be laid down as a guiding principle that dashes should be used where the interjected matter is really necessary to the understanding of the sentence; brackets where the matter might be left out without greatly affecting the

informativeness of the sentence. Compare these two examples :

(85) The first year—this was at a time when cars were by no means as reliable as they are to-day—the salesman saved five weeks by travelling by road.

(86) The salesman's car (it was a standard four-seater) paid for itself in the first two years.

Generally speaking, the bracket form of parenthesis is more definite and complete than the dash form. This point is returned to later.

THE DASH AND THE SURPRISE

We now come to the third and most interesting use of the dash, to introduce some statement intended to surprise, or move the reader to laughter through the unexpectedness of what is said. Here are some examples :

(87) Mr. Martingdale rose from the table—and fell across it dead.

(88) The gloomy gentleman smoothed the nap of his silk hat with a loving hand, stood it carefully upon the floor and—jumped on it.

- (89) Mr. Clutterbuck netted a clear profit of seven hundred pounds for his afternoon's work, and took with his dinner—cocoa!

RESTRAINT ESSENTIAL

Because the dash, when correctly used, is so effective in this connection, the young writer (young in experience, that is) is apt to overdo it. This is fatal, for the "surprise" dash without the surprise is the dampest of damp squibs.

The dash used in this way is sometimes used in place of a comma, and sometimes (as in example 89 above) to cut off a single word which would not otherwise be cut off at all. This last use of the dash has the effect of making the sentence read like this :

The last word comes as a sort of mental jolt.

THE DASH OR A COMMA?

Where the dash is used in place of a comma, the writer will sometimes be in doubt as to whether there exists sufficient justification for

the substitution of the dash. There is only one guide, *clearness of expression*. Aim not merely to convey your meaning, but also your *feeling* in the matter of which you are writing. But, generally speaking, if you do not feel that the dash is imperatively demanded, it is a pretty sure sign that a comma will do.

The point of feeling touched upon in the last paragraph is sufficiently important to justify illustration. Consider the following passage :

(90) Our industrial salvation can be won only through a Conservative government. Our economic rehabilitation is dependent upon our having a Conservative government. The prosperity of our country waits upon a Conservative government. The future of our Empire is bound up in a Conservative government. Our very existence depends upon the restoration of a Conservative government.

Now consider the same passage repunctuated.

(91) Our industrial salvation can be won only through—a Conservative government. Our economic rehabilitation is

dependent upon our having—a Conservative government. The prosperity of our country waits upon—a Conservative government. The future of our Empire is bound up in—a Conservative government. Our very existence depends upon the restoration of—a Conservative government.

IRONICAL EMPHASIS

Here the dash every time before the words *a Conservative government* gives us an insight into the real feeling of the writer on the matter. We receive an impression that he is not quite serious; he is writing with his tongue in his cheek. The emphasis he gives every time to the words *a Conservative government* is the emphasis of irony.

It was stated in an earlier chapter (see page 32) that the question whether or not a comma should be used in a short sentence of two parts should be decided on whether the second part was or was not a development of the first, and the symbols

and

were used to make the point clear. What we are now considering is merely a step further.

Take, for example, the following sentence :

(92) He entered the cab and was driven swiftly away.

Here the second part of the sentence, ushered in by the conjunction *and*, is a perfectly logical development of the first part. It may be said to be in agreement with it.

(93) He entered the cab, and straightway burst into tears.

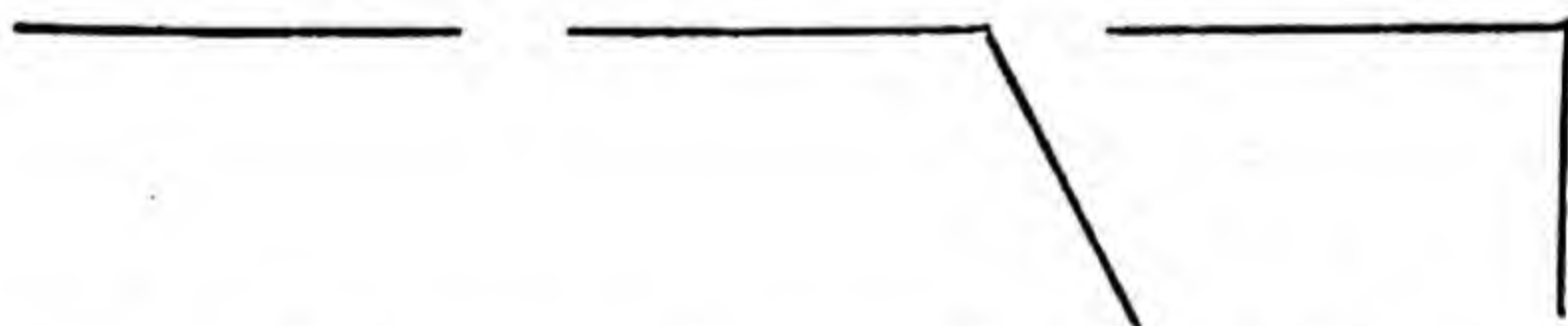
Now, whatever may be the shortcomings of the vehicles which ply for hire in our streets, it is not customary for passengers to give way to grief in this manner ; therefore, a comma is properly used. There is a "turn" in the sense, but not a very abrupt one, for after all we can hire a cab in which to cry if we wish.

(94) He entered the cab—but was dead before it had finished turning from the kerb.

Here there is a shock administered to the reader, and a dash is justified. It is a literary trick sometimes not to use the dash in these circumstances, but to adhere to the inconspicuous comma. The idea is that the dash gives some warning to the reader, and so tends to discount the carefully worked surprise.

THE BROAD RULE STATED

Thus we see that our sentence can proceed from start to finish in one of these ways :



Where the passage is smooth and straight, no punctuation mark is needed. Where the change of direction is a sort of "half-turn", a comma is adequate. But where the change of direction is abrupt, a dash is best. Even then there is room for taste. To permit ourselves one more sudden death example :

(95) He entered the room and fell down dead. Here, in my opinion, the "straight-through-ness" of the short sharp sentence induces a

greater sensation of shock than could be achieved by any "punctuational" manipulation of the sentence. But many writers would not agree with my view.

You are the author. You know exactly the impression you want to convey. Make your punctuation help by subordinating it to your meaning. Make your punctuation point your meaning. Do not allow it to dictate to you.

THE ABUSE OF THE DASH

Enough has been written here to show how extremely useful a sign the dash can be. In its very usefulness lies the danger of its improper use. Of all the signs of punctuation, the dash lends itself most readily to abuse. Not even the too-free use of commas is so distressing as the lazy employment of the dash by the man who cannot be bothered to think out the right punctuation.

THE HYPHEN

Little need be said on the subject of the hyphen. The only trouble that it will give the student will be the doubt which will

inevitably arise from time to time as to which words are hyphenated, which are joined, and which are quite separate. Do we correctly write *common-sense*, *common sense*, or *commonsense*? Do we always write it one way, or sometimes one and sometimes another, according to whether it is a noun or an adjective?

Personally, I write *common sense* for the noun, and *common-sense* for the adjective, so :

(96) It is a matter of common sense.

(97) It is the common-sense way of doing it. The best advice is—when in doubt, refer to a dependable dictionary, such as the *Concise Oxford*; which, incidentally, does not recognise “commonsense”.

HYPHENATED ADJECTIVES

Built-up adjectives are usually written with the hyphen. For example :

(98) He was besieged by vote-snatching candidates.

(99) She was startled from her sleep by the deep-throated baying of hounds.

(100) The red-haired girl and her tinkly-voiced companion were seen no more.

ADJECTIVAL CLAUSES

The use of hyphens to connect a whole clause, making of it a sort of burlesque adjective, is permissible in light writing.

(101) He gazed at me with an 'I'm-not-going-to-hurt-you-little-man' expression.

(102) It was one of those leave-your-stick-in-the-lobby-and-don't-touch-the-exhibits sort of houses—all soap-stone and snuff-boxes.

Very sparingly used, this hyphenating of clauses is permissible, even in serious writing.

Here are two examples from text-books :

(103) Some firms are clearly run on who-do-you-want-to-see-what-about-fill-in-the-form lines.—C. C. KNIGHTS

(104) Is it possible, then, to fasten your customers to you? It is, to a large extent. You can never rely upon 100% of them, as there are too many dyed-in-the-wool floaters and drifters.

—H. N. CASSON

Possibly example 103 would read better if divided, thus : "run on who-do-you-want-to-see, what-about, fill-in-the-form lines".

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PARENTHESIS AND THE APOSTROPHE

THE parenthesis or bracket has already received some attention in discussing the dash. Whenever matter needs to be put into parentheses, we have the choice of brackets or dashes, and to some extent our sense of fitness will decide the point. Personally, I feel that the bracket form of parentheses "removes" the matter further than dashes. In other words, matter placed between brackets is treated as less essential than that placed between dashes. Matter between dashes is shown quite clearly to be parenthetical, but somehow it still remains an integral part of the sentence.

THE BRACKET'S ADVANTAGE

A point which should not be lost sight of is

that the dash has uses other than parentheses, but the bracket has not. The dash may be misunderstood, but the bracket cannot be.

- (105) The effect of making a colour darker (by lowering the Value), or paler (by weakening the Chroma), is to make permissible the use of a larger expanse of that colour without disturbing chromatic balance—theoretically.
- (106) Here the enforced colour (that is, the colour that the nature of the product demands shall be used) is a ruby red.
- (107) The most direct and appealing advertisement lacks something which can be provided only by personal contact between the seller (or his representative, the retailer) and the prospective buyer.
- (108) It may be that the customer is just trying to see if he (this type is often a man) can get you to make a slip, in your anxiety to break down the apathy that this silence seems to indicate.

In examples 105 and 106 above, the brackets are really essential, but in 107 and 108 dashes

can be substituted ; which does not mean, however, that they should have been used.

BRACKETS CLEARLY REQUIRED

In certain other circumstances brackets are clearly called for, in order to enclose explanatory matter, which is inserted to recall to the reader something which has gone before.

(109) The customer entered the department, and after a while her Interest was Aroused (State One) by the silver net. By her own observation, and by calling on previous experience, she Added to her Knowledge (State Two). She then Adjusted it to her Needs (State Three), and Appreciated Suitability (State Four). She desired to possess it (State Five). She learned the price, Considered Cost (State Six), and Decided to Buy (State Seven).

—C. C. KNIGHTS

Where items in a sentence are numbered, the numbers are correctly placed in brackets.

(110) The duration of the training will naturally depend on (i) the knowledge

already possessed by the persons being trained ; (ii) the nature of the proposition ; (iii) the teacher ; (iv) whether the salesmen are being prepared to go straight on the road ; (v) whether administrative duties are being combined with the training, and so on.—*Ibid.*

WHOLE SENTENCES IN BRACKETS

Sometimes a whole sentence is put in brackets, as in the example below, or even several sentences. At best, this is clumsy, and a little trouble will enable you to avoid it.

(iii) In other words, they leave the article to "sell itself" after being advertised. (The retailer's own advertising is referred to here.) Very often it does, but this must not be presumed.

A slight reconstruction would avoid the use of the brackets which are not necessary.

THE BRACKET AT THE END

When a bracket comes at the end of the sentence, where should it be placed relative to the period or other terminal sign ?

When the bracket belongs to the sentence *in its entirety*, it goes *outside* the terminal sign. For an example of this see (111) above.

When the bracket belongs to *part only* of the sentence, it goes *inside* the terminal sign.

(112) He spoke of it in the smoke-room
(we were dining with him).

—MAY SINCLAIR

WHEN TO USE THE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe has two simple and easily understood uses—to indicate the possessive case, or to indicate the omission of a letter or letters. A little thought will prevent any error in its use in the first manner; but very many people seem to go wrong in the second. Strictly speaking, neither use belongs to punctuation as an aid to self-expression.

INANIMATE THINGS TAKE THE APOSTROPHE

A mistake sometimes made is to imagine that inanimate things do not call for the apostrophe; whereas they do. The apostrophe is correctly used in the following instances.

(113) The sun's light . . .

(114) In a few minutes' time . . .

It should be noted that the apostrophe goes inside the last letter when the noun is in the singular number, but outside when it is in the plural. A rudimentary rule, but one frequently ignored. Names of people ending with *s* are exceptions.

Women's and *Men's* have the apostrophe inside, because the words have their plurality indicated by their spelling, without any aid from the apostrophe. Compare the following.

(115) This Way to the Ladies' Cloakroom.

(116) Found—a Lady's Handbag.

IN PLACE OF MISSING LETTERS

The use of the apostrophe to indicate the omission of a letter or letters is perfectly straightforward. In the following examples the apostrophe is correctly used in this way.

(117) You say it can't be done.

(118) That won't make any difference.

(119) Don't you dare say "sha'n't" to me!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE QUESTION AND EXCLAMATION MARKS AS AIDS TO EXPRESSION

UNLIKE some of the other punctuation signs, the question mark is under-used rather than over-used by those little practised in writing. The omission of the question mark is usually the result of carelessness and not of ignorance. The deplorable use of the question mark in duplicate or triplicate has been already discussed (see page 16) and nothing needs to be added on that point here.

THE INTERNAL QUESTION MARK

There seems to exist a mistaken idea that the question mark can be used only at the end of a sentence. This is not so, for it can be used internally. It is frequently so used in dialogue, so:

(120) "Will you be going to the fair?" she asked.

QUESTION AND EXCLAMATION MARKS 81

“What can it matter to you, whether I do or I don’t?” he countered.

In each case here there is only one sentence, and the question mark is not at the end. The confusion seems to have arisen from the fact that where the question mark does come at the end, it supplants the period. Whether or not the question mark is followed by a capital letter is determined by whether the mark has taken the place of a period or of a lesser stop.

The frequently repeated internal question mark serves as an aid to precise expression, in that it helps us to create in our reader’s mind the impression we wish. Thus, a sense of the doubt felt by the person written of in this sentence is conveyed to the reader by means of the repeated question mark :

(121) Which waistcoat should he wear?—
the blue? the green? the mauve?
the cinnamon? the canary? or the
white with pink spots?

This sentence should be re-written, however.

Here is a simpler example of the internal question mark :

- (122) How soon ? is the vital question, and the only one concerning Italy now being considered in the Chancelleries of Europe, or probably in our own alert and watchful Department of State.—*The Referee*

In this example the placing of the question mark at the end of the sentence would be fatal to clearness—and that is the true test of rightness or wrongness. For simplicity, however, the words *How soon ?* should be inserted between double quotation marks.

EXAMPLES FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS

The following are some examples of the internal use of the question mark.

- (123) My cousin seemed surprised to see me. “ Alone ? ” she said. “ And walking ? on a market day ? Did your uncle know of it ? ”—GRACE RHYS

- (124) And then he proceeds to preach the Old Masters. But how ?—why ?—to what end ? . . . Does he recommend his old masters for copying, then ?—for mere imitation ? Not a

bit of it—he comes down like a hammer on copying.

—A. QUILLER-COUCH

(125) For what purpose does the poet wish for a thousand tongues, but to sing? for what purpose a thousand hands but to pluck the wires? not to dip a thousand pens into a thousand ink-pots.—*Ibid.*

(126) “And you remember who fought for you? who lied for you harder than you could lie, and swore he knew you couldn’t swim?”—JACK LONDON

(127) “Take anything now, sir?” said the waiter, lighting the candle in desperation at Mr. Pickwick’s silence. “Tea or coffee, sir? dinner, sir?”

—CHARLES DICKENS

In the last example, a capital letter for dinner is clearly indicated, but Dickens is notorious for his bad punctuation. It is most interesting to compare the punctuation of the two passages from Sir A. Quiller-Couch. In 124, dashes are used after the internal question marks, but not in 125.

THE INTERJECTED QUESTION

Sometimes a question is interjected, and is placed between brackets or dashes, so :

(128) He crossed the floor (stands England where she did ?) and greeted the dago as an equal.

(129) Mr. Todmarsh returns with — are we to believe our eyes ?—the elder Miss Flashney on his arm.

The question mark alone in brackets is discussed under the heading of Compound Forms of Punctuation (see page 123).

THE “IMPERATIVE” QUESTION

Quite a number of persons are doubtful as to whether some phrases which seem to be framed in question form do or do not require the mark. Take, for example, the following, written by a housewife to her grocer :

(130) Will you send me a tin of assorted biscuits with the other things I ordered.

This is sometimes called the “imperative” question. Does it need the question mark?

Not really, for the arrangement of the first two words is by way of being a small courtesy. What the sentence means is : " Please send me a tin . . ." but that is somewhat peremptory, so we soften it by putting it in semi-question form. But no question as to the grocer sending the biscuits arises, for we know that he will be pleased to do so.

Where doubt exists, however, as to the ability of the grocer to comply with our request, the sentence is properly cast in the form of a question. For example :

(131) Will it be possible for you to send a tin of biscuits with the other things I ordered ?

Here doubt is expressed, not of the grocer's willingness to do as we ask, but of his plain ability to do so.

THE RHETORICAL QUESTION

A question which is made a question for the sake of effect, but which does not call for an answer (at least, not from the outside) is called a rhetorical question, and usually takes the mark. Thus :

(132) Is this, then, the "land fit for heroes" that we were promised? Is this to be the reward of our sacrifice?

The quotation (124) from Sir A. Quiller-Couch provides an example of the use of the rhetorical question.

THE OPTIONAL QUESTION MARK

Some sentences can be so framed that the use of the question mark is optional, at the writer's discretion. Here the true guide is the author's own feeling in the matter. Does he feel that the words are being used in an interrogatory or in a declaratory sense? Is he seeking enlightenment, or making a statement?

(133) What connection has the present industrial unrest with the war.

This sentence, without the question mark (and read with slight emphasis on the word *has*), implies that in the writer's opinion the connection is non-existent, or practically so. But complete with the question mark, the sentence implies that there is a connection, and that the writer is asking the question,

either to have it answered for him, or to answer it himself for the edification of his readers. In these last circumstances, it becomes a rhetorical question.

THE QUESTION AND QUOTATION MARKS

The question mark does not always go either inside or outside quotation marks, where the two come together, but sometimes in one position and sometimes in the other, according to the construction and sense.

(134) "Where shall we find another such as he?"

Here the question mark goes inside the quotation marks, for it belongs to that which is "quoted" or spoken.

(135) How many times have you been told to avoid such ridiculous jargon as "pursuant to yours of even date"?

Here the question mark properly goes outside the quotation marks, as it does not belong to that part of the question which is quoted, but to the sentence as a whole.

Sometimes we get a period occurring at the

end of the sentence, in addition to the question and quotation marks. For example :

- (136) There is a very wonderful film being shown entitled “ Quo Vadis ? ”.

Here the question mark belongs to *Quo Vadis ?* (Whither goest thou?), as do the quotation marks, because it is the title of the film. The period is necessary because its omission would leave the sentence without a terminal sign.

Here is a sentence which requires a different arrangement of three signs :

- (137) “ I have told you again and again not to use such expressions as ‘ piffing ’ and ‘ rot ’.”

Here the period goes inside the double quotes, because these do not belong to part of the sentence, but to all of it. When the sentence is framed as a quotation, the question mark replaces the period, but remains in the same position, so :

- (138) “ Have I not told you again and again not to use such expressions as ‘ piffing ’ and ‘ rot ’ ? ”

It is possible to have a combination of

QUESTION AND EXCLAMATION MARKS 89

four signs at the end of a sentence. For example :

(130) "John," said his mother, "has gone to see a film called 'Quo Vadis?'."

This multiplicity of signs at the end of a sentence is not artistic, and we should seek by paraphrase to avoid it as far as possible.

THE DOUBLE QUESTION

What happens when we get a double question at the end of a sentence? For example :

(140) Who was it said : "What care I how fair she be?"?

This example is punctuated as the sense demands, for there is a question within a question. But it looks awkward, and all good writers would omit the second question mark as unnecessary. The purist would paraphrase, and avoid the necessity of the double question mark at the end, as in this manner :

(141) "What care I how fair she be?"
Who wrote that?

THE EXCLAMATION MARK

The exclamation mark is a form of emphasis. Its use is an evidence of emotion or strong

feeling, of excitement or anger, of incredulity (when it is frequently substituted for the weaker question mark), of fervour or ecstasy.

(142) "Lower away the boats ! Women and children first !"

(143) "Get out of my sight, sir !"

(144) "You have married the daughter of that upstart !"

THE EMPHATIC EXCLAMATION MARK

Because it is a form of emphasis, and all emphasis should be used with restraint, be sparing in your use of the exclamation mark. Remember that dull writing will not be redeemed by the excessive use of exclamation marks. When writing dialogue, particularly, be on your guard against the too-free use of the exclamation mark.

Here are two simple examples of the use of the exclamation mark in order to give emphasis :

(145) "Gone are the days when the sales manager was a stay-at-home critic—

and a pretty ruthless one!—of the sales staff.—C. C. KNIGHTS

- (146) In exactly the same way, when referring to the faults of customers, I have usually employed the feminine gender, in no way meaning to infer that men shoppers are free from fault—far from it!—*Ibid.*

THE IRONICAL MARK

This mark can sometimes be used to convey a powerful suggestion of irony. For example :

- (147) Oh, you ornament of society ! You model of rectitude ! You protector of the weak and defenceless ! You dove-complete-with-olive-branch !

THE COMMAND

The exclamation mark is the accepted sign to follow a word of command.

- (148) Company, stand at—ease !

Thus we find it used by advertisers :

- (149) Send for this Free Sample !

- (150) Write to-day !

- (151) Call and Get Yours !

IN THE DECLAMATORY STYLE

The exclamation mark is needed when we write in the declamatory style, so :

(152) How few of us are worthy of this honour !

(153) How good ! how kind ! and he is gone.—TENNYSON

THE INTERNAL EXCLAMATION MARK

This last example illustrates another point—that the exclamation mark, like the mark of interrogation, does not necessarily demand a capital letter following it. The exclamation mark can be used internally.

(154) You see, O my modest friend ! that your gamut need not to be very wide to begin with.—A. QUILLER-COUCH

(155) “By Jove ! that’s just the very notion. Only, how am I—alone, I mean—to——” —C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

(156) “But my books !—he might make a bad use of them.”—HENRY MURGER

(157) “Oh, the beast ! the beast ! the

beast ! ” growled the Englishman, starting up in his armchair.—*Ibid.*

(158) “ Asleep ! You ! and my father in danger ! I thought you were on the watch ! ”—BRAM STOKER

(159) The cavern grew darker farther up. Flick ! something flew over my head. Flick ! as I soared in mid-strife I saw a spear hit and quiver in one of the carcasses to my left. Then, as I came down, one hit the ground before me, and I heard the remote chuzz ! with which their things were fired. Flick ! flick ! for a moment it was a shower. They were volleying !—H. G. WELLS

These examples, 154 to 159, serve to illustrate the somewhat unpleasant explosive style that results from the use of the internal exclamation mark.

IN PLACE OF THE QUESTION MARK

The exclamation mark can in certain circumstances be substituted for the question mark, thus :

(160) “ What am I going to do about it !

You have the effrontery to ask me—
what am I going to do about it ! ”

- (161) There are two Martin Chuzzlewits,
my dear ; and your carrying your
anger to one might have a serious
effect—who knows !—upon the other.

—CHARLES DICKENS

- (162) Oh late-remembered, much-forgotten,
mouthing braggart duty, always owed
and seldom paid in any other coin
than punishment and wrath, when will
mankind begin to know thee !—*Ibid.*

In the first of these examples, 160, the question of another person is repeated with indignation. The exclamation mark is required to express that indignation, and the question mark is sacrificed in its favour. But the question mark should have been used on the first occasion, as that was mere repetition.

THE EXCLAMATION AND QUOTATION MARKS

The remarks made (on page 87 and elsewhere) with regard to the position of the question mark, relative to quotation marks at

the end of the sentence, apply also to the exclamation mark. For example, in the following sentence the exclamation mark has replaced the period, and as such correctly takes its place inside the quotation marks.

(163) "You shall do nothing of the sort, sir!"

In the following sentence, however, the exclamation mark comes outside the quotation marks; otherwise the emphasis for which it stands would appear to belong to the words quoted, and not to the original remarks of the person now expressing himself.

(164) Don't dare to speak to me again of
"the weaker sex"!

Observe the placing of the signs at the end of the following sentence.

(165) "What balderdash is the remark:
'The customer is always right'!"

A better way to punctuate this, which demands slight paraphrasing, is the following:

(166) "What balderdash is this!—"The customer is always right'."

In this last example we get the "indignation" sign rightly placed after the first part of the remark.

CHAPTER NINE

HOW TO HANDLE QUOTATION MARKS AND DIALOGUE

THE single and double quotation marks may be taken together, for the sake of convenience.

Quotations, including speech, require quotation marks, or “inverted commas” as they are frequently called, though it is only those at the beginning of the quotation which are inverted. In the following examples, the marks are correctly used :

(167) “There is more in this than meets the eye,” he said.

(168) The band struck up “Auld Lang Syne”, under the impression that it was the Scotch national anthem.

(169) There was evidence in plenty of “a certain liveliness”.

(170) Like Omar Khayyám, I have “heard

great Argument, about it and about ",
but remain of the same mind.

There was at one time a rule which put the titles of books and periodicals in quotation marks, but the best modern practice is to put them in Italic type. Compare the following :

(171) I saw the review of your book, " The Flying Scotchman ", in the " Manchester Guardian ".

(172) I saw the review of your book, *The Flying Scotchman*, in the *Manchester Guardian*.

WORDS LOOSELY EMPLOYED

Where words are not used in their strict sense, they are put into " quotes ", which is tantamount to an apology on the writer's part for not being able to find a better word.

(173) There are two " legitimate " outlets for energy—physical and mental.

(174) If the customer does not " rise " to the suggestion at once, drop it and conclude the sale.

TECHNICAL TERMS

Terms which are well understood and freely used in technical talk may seem out of place

when used in a formal text-book. But the fact that they are so well understood, by exactly the reader for whom the author is writing, makes him loth to forgo their use; so he compromises by putting them in quotes.

(175) If a further sale is made, the card is returned to the "live" file.

(176) It not infrequently happens that the customer "springs" the price question.

(177) The salesman must be very courteous towards the "prospect".

SINGLE AND DOUBLE QUOTATION MARKS

Though it seems scarcely logical, it is the usual practice to-day to use the double quotation marks first, and the single quotation marks second—that is, where we have a quotation inside a quotation, it is the inner quotation which has the single "quotes", in this manner:

(178) "Like the lilies," said my father,
" ' they toil not, neither do they spin ',
so far as I have been able to discover."

(179) "Remember, my boy, 'costly thy raiment' and all that sort of thing."

In rare cases where you get a quotation (using the word in its wider sense) within the inner quotation, you should revert to double quotation marks, and so it goes on.

(180) "His last words to me," said the doctor, "were: 'I shall not be sorry to "shuffle off this mortal coil", for I am very tired'."

QUOTATION MARKS AND THE TERMINAL SIGN

Observe, in example 180, how the signs are placed at the end. The period goes inside the double quotation marks, because these belong to the sentence in its entirety, but outside the single quotation marks, because these belong only to a part of the sentence.

It is customary to put the period, when that is the terminal sign, inside the quotation marks, except as in example 180 above. For example:

(181) "Your energy would be praiseworthy," said Rodgers, "were it not so frequently misdirected."

(182) "Empty vessels"—so the old proverb runs—"make the most sound."

For a consideration of the question mark and quotation marks at the end of a sentence, see page 80, and elsewhere.

“ QUOTING ” THOUGHTS

Should thoughts be placed in quotation marks? The rule is that they should be, when the thoughts are given in the thinker's mental words—for we do think in words.

(183) “ I'm blessed if I'll give way now,”
thought Edward; “ I'll see them to
Jericho first ! ”

Here we are given the actual thought-words, and they are properly “ quoted ”.

(184) Edward thought he would not give way now. He was prepared to see them “ to Jericho ” first.

Here only the colloquial phrase, “ to Jericho ”, is quoted, and that because we wish the reader to understand that this expression was used by Edward, not by us.

THE PUNCTUATION OF DIALOGUE

In punctuating dialogue, there is the matter of internal punctuation to be looked after,

and also paragraphing. The matter is complicated by the fact that very often we have four factors to consider—(i) what is said; (ii) who says it; (iii) how it is said; and (iv) the action that is interwoven with the dialogue.

ACTION AND DIALOGUE TOGETHER

To take the last point first, it is the combination of dialogue and action which seems to give the inexperienced author the most trouble, because an attempt is usually made to mix the two in the same paragraph. This is a mistake. Clearness will be better served if we keep our action and dialogue in separate paragraphs, beginning a fresh paragraph every time we drop again into dialogue.

The following extract, from a short story, *Breath of Life*, which appeared in *Truth*, shows how a mixture of dialogue should be handled.

(185) "It is most ingenious. . . . Did you never see the man—what did you say his name was?—after they went away?"

"Not from that day . . . until to-night!"

The man calling himself Captain Markham started violently, and hastened to put the table between himself and Macfie.

“Then you—you knew me all the time?”

“Yes, I knew you well enough, Luke Sherman. You don’t think I could fail to recognise you in spite of your great beard, even after fourteen years?”

Sherman stood up straight, and for several seconds looked down at Macfie in contempt. Then he walked again to the window.

“Lit by Lucy’s hand, fourteen years ago,” he said, *and blew out the lamp.*

It should be noted that a fresh paragraph is begun for each piece of the dialogue, but occasionally minor parts of the action are described in the words which follow the dialogue. The concluding sentence of the extract above is an example of this. Short action may follow dialogue in the same paragraph; but, generally speaking, the reverse does not hold good.

THREE FURTHER FACTORS

If, then, we separate our dialogue from our main action, we have both simplified our own task, and also done something to add to clearness. This leaves us three factors to consider—what is said, by whom it is said, and how, when, or where it is said. Thus :

(186) “I am afraid I do not follow your meaning,” said Miss Rogers, with a return of her former coldness of manner.

Here, apart from the quotation marks, always used for dialogue, and the terminal period, the sentence is punctuated with two commas, which are perfectly adequate. In stronger circumstances a semicolon would be better after Miss Rogers, so :

(187) “I am afraid I do not follow your meaning,” said Miss Rogers; and she turned her narrow back upon me.

Where what is spoken is in the form of a question or an exclamation, the appropriate signs are used. For example :

(188) "Do you really think so?" asked his visitor, eagerly.

"I certainly do!" retorted Andrew. I have known writers use the dash after spoken words. The punctuation of the following examples is faulty in this respect:

(189) "Do you really think so?"—asked his visitor, eagerly.

"I certainly do!"—retorted Andrew. Where there is a pause in the middle of a remark, it can be rendered by means of the hiatus (see page 114). Of the two examples following, the first is faulty, and the second preferable.

(190) "I don't know . . ." said Peter, doubtfully; "I should hardly think so."

(191) "I don't know," said Peter, doubtfully . . . "I should hardly think so."

The pause is in the action, not in the dialogue, but this could be expressed by the use of a semicolon, thus: "I don't know," said Peter, doubtfully; "I should hardly think so."

CHAPTER TEN

QUOTATION MARKS AND DIALOGUE (*continued*)

WHERE the dialogue is in two parts, separated by some such clause as *said the Captain*, doubt sometimes exists as to what sign should follow the interpolated wording. This point can often be settled by regarding the sentence without the interpolation. For example :

(192) "The tide is running full ; we must sail at once."

When we interpolate *said the Captain*, we retain the semicolon, but it comes after the additional words. So :

(193) "The tide is running full," said the Captain ; "we must sail at once."

Note that the punctuation of the following example is faulty. The longer pause indicated by the semicolon is in the wrong place.

(194) "The tide is running full ;" said the Captain, "we must sail at once."

In the following example, the remark is continuous ; therefore our interpolated *said the Duchess* is correctly marked off by commas only.

(195) "Will you," said the Duchess, "take a little more tea ?"

Note that the comma, though it does not belong to the Duchess's remark (she did not say "*Will you, take a little more tea ?*"), goes inside the quotation marks. This also applies to the terminal sign, which should always go inside the quotes in dialogue (see page 99).

Many writers prefer not to divide a straightforward remark if they can help it. The sentence, 195, could have been written and punctuated so :

(196) "Will you take a little more tea ?" said the Duchess.

A USEFUL RULE

Where dialogue is interrupted by matter concerning the action of the story, punctuate the sentence as far as possible as it would have been punctuated if the interpolated matter had not been introduced.

The following examples, carefully studied, should make this clear :

(197) "The king is dead : long live the king !"

(198) "The king is dead," said the general ;
"long live the king !"

Note here that the semicolon is used after *general* and not after *dead*, because it is after *general* that we want the long pause.

Now consider these further examples.

(199) "I am going for my holidays ; I have earned a rest."

(200) "I am going for my holidays," said Broughton ; "I have earned a rest."

(201) "The school is closed. I am free."

(202) "The school is closed," said Inchcape. "I am free."

(203) "Is this the way you behave ? I am ashamed of you !"

(204) "Is this the way you behave ?" asked the new governess. "I am ashamed of you !"

AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

It will be noticed that in most instances a comma is introduced to separate the inter-

polated wording from the first part of the speech, and the mark formerly used there is moved to the end of the interpolated matter. In the last example, however, the first part of the speech retains the question mark, and a period is introduced after *governess*. Otherwise the sentence would be wrongly punctuated, as below.

(205) "Is this the way you behave,"
asked the new governess? "I am
ashamed of you!"

Note the slightly amended punctuation in the following example:

(206) "But—I thought—that is . . . aren't
you going after all?"

(207) "But—I thought—that is——" stam-
mered Paul . . . "aren't you going
after all?"

LEADING INTO DIALOGUE

Smoothness of reading is sometimes served by making the dialogue read on from the non-dialogue matter, but in a fresh paragraph. See how Jack London does it in *Adventure*.

(208) He was patently very angry. She

sipped the last of her coffee, and arose, saying,—

“ I’ll wait until you are in a better temper before taking up the discussion again. . . .”

This use of both the comma and the dash to introduce dialogue has, in my opinion, no justification, and is not recommended. The comma without the dash, perhaps ; but both, no. What is put forward as good practice is the method followed by a number of good writers—the use of the colon.

(209) After a few seconds of silence, Mr. Trelawny said to Mr. Corbeck :

“ You have told Doctor Winchester all up to the present, as we arranged ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered ; so Mr. Trelawny said :

“ And I have told Margaret, so we all know ! ”

Then turning to the doctor, he asked :

“ And am I to take it that you, knowing all as we know it who have followed the matter for years, wish to share in the experiment ? ”

His answer was direct and uncompromising :

“Certainly . . .”

—BRAM STOKER

It will be seen that in this short passage, taken from *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*, Bram Stoker uses the device no fewer than four times. As a matter of fact, he uses it consistently throughout the book, and we get page after page of action and dialogue so linked. Admirable as this is in securing continuity, it is, at best, a form of literary laziness. Occasionally used, it can be excused ; overdone, it becomes slipshod and wearisome.

Sir A. Quiller-Couch uses the “pointer” (i.e. a colon and a dash) to lead into dialogue.

(210) Presently he laid down his flute again and spoke :—

“I scarcely expected you.”

HOW ARNOLD BENNETT HANDLES DIALOGUE

Here, for the purposes of comparison, is a perfectly punctuated passage from a short story, *The Fortune Teller*, by Arnold Bennett,

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who is in this, as in many other ways, a literary model to be followed assiduously.

(211) "Why do you come to me? You don't believe in me," said Balsamo, curtly. "Why waste your money?"

"How can I tell you whether I believe in you or not," protested Adam Tellwright, the shrewd man of business, very lamely. "I've come to see what you can do."

Balsamo snapped his fingers.

"Sit down then," said he, "and put your hands on this cushion. No l—palms up!"

EXAMPLES OF DIALOGUE FOLLOWING ACTION

It was laid down above that dialogue should always be started with a fresh paragraph. While reiterating that this is sound advice for the embryo author, I must admit that many gifted writers do not proceed in this way.

(212) She talked in little panting sentences, because Lewisham was walking in heedless big strides. "I wonder

how much—such people—could earn honestly.”

Lewishman slowly became aware of the question at his ear. “How much could they earn? I haven’t the slightest idea.”—H. G. WELLS

- (213) I stared at him. I had not suspected this aspect of the matter before. But it came to me at once—a positive craving. “Yes,” I said with emphasis. “I am hungry too.”—*Ibid.*

Here is a final example of dialogue and action, simply alternated :

- (214) There was a woman standing by the door as I entered, who looked curiously at me for a moment, then turned to nudge a man at her side, and whisper. The whisper grew as I pressed forward, and before I could reach the counter, a hand was laid on my shoulder from behind. I turned.

“Well?” said I.

It was a heavy-looking drover that had touched me.

“Are you the chap that was tried

to-day for murder of Jeweller Todd?" he asked.

"Well?" said I again, but I could see the crowd falling back, as if I were a leper, at his question.

"Well? 'Taint well then, as I reckon, to be making so free with respectable folk."

There was a murmur of assent from the mouths turned towards me. The landlord came forward from behind the bar.

"I was acquitted," I urged defiantly.

"Acquitted!" said he, with big scorn in the syllables. "Hear un now—ac-quitted! Landlord, is this a respectable house?"

The landlord gave his verdict.

"H'out yer goes, and damn yer impudence!"—A. QUILLER-COUCH

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE HIATUS AND OTHER COMPOUND FORMS

BY compound forms I do not mean those marks which accidentally come together, as at the end of example 193 in the preceding chapter, but deliberately constructed combinations. One of the most useful is the "hiatus". This is a series of dots, and is commonly used when we wish to quote a part of something, but not all of it, the words omitted being from the middle of the sentence.

(215) I have read . . . that Dickens could walk up one side of a long busy street, and down the other, and tell you in their order the names on all the shop signs ; the fact was alleged as an illustration of his great powers of observation.—ARNOLD BENNETT

Sometimes the hiatus (the meaning of the

word is a *break* or *gap*) is used when the speaker leaves something unsaid as being more powerful than its actual utterance (see page 118). In these circumstances the hiatus is a sort of punctuational shrug of the shoulders.

(216) "You will return to me in one hour's time with the money you have stolen. Otherwise . . ."

(217) "I have been very patient with you, I feel. Do not try me too much or . . ."

(218) "If I had found him in a reasonable frame of mind, it was my intention to make a clean breast of everything. As it was . . ."

The hiatus is properly used to indicate broken speech—that is, where the words are spoken in jerks and spasms, and not straight off. The following passage is taken from *Love and Mr. Lewisham*. Mr. H. G. Wells is very fond of this device.

(219) "I hate telling you these things. It is you . . . if you didn't mind . . . but you make it all different. I could do it—if it wasn't for you. I was . . ."

I was helping. I had gone meaning to help if anything went wrong at Mr. Lagune's. Yes—that night. No . . . don't. It was too hard before to tell you.”—H. G. WELLS

Sometimes the hiatus is used to suggest the time occupied by the action described. The following example is taken from Chapter XVII of the *First Men in the Moon* (H. G. Wells), descriptive of a fight between Cavor and Bedford on one side and the Selenites.

(220) I seem to remember his footsteps coming on behind me. Step, leap . . . whack, step, leap . . . Each step seemed to last ages.

From the same book, I take an illustration to show the use of the hiatus to indicate profundity of thought :

(221) Whose purposes, what purposes was I serving? . . . I ceased to speculate on why we had come to the moon, and took a wider sweep. Why had I come to the earth? Why had I a private life at all . . .

The hiatus is useful to deepen the power

of an impression which the writer wishes to induce in the mind of the reader.

(222) Snow, as far as the eye can reach.

(223) Snow . . . as far as the eye can reach.

I believe, though I am unable to verify the reference, that 223 is the opening of a short story by Bret Harte.

The use of the hiatus in original writing is something quite different from its use in quoting the words of another. In the first instance, it is part and parcel of the author's self-expression; in the second it is a mere utilitarian expedient.

The hiatus is here regarded as a compound punctuation mark, because it appears to be comprised of a series of dots, usually three but sometimes two or four. It should be clearly appreciated that the dots used for the hiatus are not full points, but just dots, and a capital letter is seldom necessary after them, as the examples given will show. In the works of American authors, one sometimes sees the asterisk used instead of the dot, but the effect is both ugly and distracting. Their methods of writing fiction should not be copied.

- (224) Here was a table littered with books, there a chair, yonder a shadowy mantel * * * * A door opened and a man entered the room * * * * moved about the study aimlessly for a time as if deeply troubled, then dropped into a chair at the desk * * * * made some hopeless gesture with his hands and leaned forward on the desk with his head on his arms * * * * Another figure in the room * * * * knife in his hand * * * * was creeping stealthily towards the unconscious figure in the chair with the knife raised * * * *

—JACQUES FUTRELLE

This passage looks better, and reads more smoothly, when these punctuational fireworks are replaced by dots, or other signs.

- (225) Here was a table littered with books, there a chair, yonder a shadowy mantel. A door opened and a man entered the room . . . moved about the study aimlessly for a time as if deeply troubled, then dropped into a

chair at the desk . . . made some hopeless gesture with his hands and leaned forward on the desk with his head on his arms. Another figure in the room, knife in hand, was creeping stealthily towards the unconscious figure in the chair with the knife raised . . .

A SPECIAL USE OF THE HIATUS

Exactly as the hiatus is used in the middle of a quotation to indicate that some words of the original have been omitted for the sake of expedience, so it can be used at the beginning of a sentence to indicate that we have not quoted the original from the start of the author's sentence. It is customary, in these circumstances, if the quotation comes in a sentence by itself, to commence with a capital letter, though a small letter may have been used in the original, so :

(226) . . . it is twice blest ; it blesseth
him that gives and him that takes.

—SHAKESPEARE

Sometimes, however, the use of the capital

letter is apt to be misleading, and in such circumstances it is permissible to depart from the general rule, and to commence the sentence with the hiatus followed by a small letter, as in 226. But, whenever possible, quotations should consist of complete sentences.

THE HIATUS AND THE PERIOD

As stated above, the hiatus consists of dots merely, and not of full-points or periods. The correct position of the first dot is *not* close against the word, as in the case of a full-point, but some little distance away. Thus :

(227) Boom . . . Boom . . . Boom . . .

It came from beneath our feet, a sound in the earth.—H. G. WELLS

But where the sentence is complete before the use of the hiatus (or, rather, the pause for which the hiatus stands), the period is placed in its usual place, close up against the word, and then the hiatus follows. *The dots all look alike, but the first is a period ; the others are just dots which collectively make the hiatus.*

(228) “The weather,” the fat little man

remarked presently, "has been immense, has it not? I don't know when we have had such a summer. . . ."—H. G. WELLS

The hiatus can follow any other sign of punctuation. For example :

(229) I perceived with a sudden novel vividness the extraordinary folly of everything I had ever done. "Ass!" I said; "oh, ass, unutterable ass . . . I seem to exist only to go about doing preposterous things. . . . Why did we ever leave the thing? . . . Hoping about looking for patents and concessions in the crater of the moon! . . . If only we had had the sense to fasten a handkerchief to a stick to show where we had left the sphere!"

—H. G. WELLS

I have, in the example above, followed the author's punctuation exactly, but I think that an exclamation mark or a period is required after the third repetition of the word *ass*, and that a comma would be sufficient after the

first word *ass*. Otherwise, without the hiatus it reads : “ *Ass / oh, ass, unutterable ass I seem to exist,*” etc., which is not what the author intended.

THE POINTER

Very little need be said of this sign, which is a compound of the colon and a dash. Its use is sufficiently illustrated by the following.

(230) There are three ways of mentioning the price, and they are :—

- (i) Price alone ;
- (ii) Price and then the Reason ;
- (iii) Reason and then the Price.

Personally (as will be seen throughout this book) I prefer the colon alone, or the dash alone, to the two together. The pointer seems to me particularly out of place in the middle of a sentence. The following is a typical example of the faulty use of the pointer :

(231) There are three primary colours, and they are :—red, blue, and yellow.

A colon is required here, as the subsequent words form an enumeration.

THE BRACKETED INTERROGATION MARK

This is a perfectly justified aid to expression, but it should be used only when it is unmistakably needed, as it cannot be called artistic. It is either a suggestion of sarcasm and irony on the part of the writer, or is intended to throw doubt on the previous words.

(232) Mr. Pringle, having paid this tribute to the honesty (?) of the boatman, went below to his cabin.

(233) So much for this precious solution (?) of our difficulties.

The bracketed question mark can, as stated, be used where some doubt exists of the accuracy of a statement, and there are no means at hand of verifying the fact. For example :

(234) This painting was executed in 1470, at Florence (?), and is in the artist's more robust style.

This is, however, rather a slovenly way of writing, for a simple paraphrase would obviate the use of the question mark.

THE BRACKETED EXCLAMATION MARK

This is very similar in use to the bracketed question mark, in that it expresses sarcasm or irony. In fact, the exclamation mark is often substituted in such circumstances.

(235) For your generosity (!) towards me I trust you will be suitably rewarded.

(236) For bringing three drowning children to safety he received the munificent (!) reward of sixpence.

The student and the new-comer to creative writing should be extremely chary of using this method of expression.

236 would be expressed much better so :

(237) For bringing three drowning children to safety, he received the munificent reward of—sixpence !

